

up again. If they want to get new positions in the meantime, all right. It's pretty hard, three young fellows counting on a steady situation being thrown out this way, and I want to be just all around."

So thus it was settled, and the old housekeeper at the Ross home grumbled considerably at having three "big boys" hanging around the house all of the time, as she expressed it.

Rogers, the bookkeeper, turned out to be quite an exquisite. He dropped into the new arrangement as though he was accommodating some one. He lay around smoking and reading in a comfortable hammock most of the time, but was always on hand for his heels.

The old assistant manager, Mahon, devoted most of his time to hanging around the village billiard hall. Both borrowed money from Mr. Ross, who catered to their necessities and studied them.

Young Bert Delancy was restless and out of sorts the first day he arrived. He broke out into rebellion the third morning. If it had not been for the engaging presence of Elsa he might have broke through the traces before.

"See here, Mr. Ross," he said in his independent, off-handed way, "you're a generous-hearted old man, but I'm no sponger. I don't see why three husky fellows like us should be dependent on you."

"Don't you want to resume your old position when we start up business again?" inquired Mr. Ross.

"Surely, but I'm not born to be idle."

"All right; I'll make a new bargain with all three of you fellows. There's a big garden to take care of, there's wood to saw and all kinds of odd jobs about the place. Put in your time about them and I'll pay a fair price for the service."

Rogers regarded his well-manicured hands and the rough garden tools, shrugged his shoulders and betook himself to his hammock.

Mahon tried clearing some brush, got a few thorns in his fingers and hid him to the cue and ivories for solace.

Bert pitched in forthwith. He mended the broken fences. He made the straggly garden look as if an expert had gone over it. One morning Mr. Ross came out to find him with saw and buck tackling a four-cord pile of stove wood.

The old man's eyes twinkled secretly. That evening when work was suspended, he stole out to the wood-pile and put a little clinking bag way under the last log of the heap.

Bert rather liked the task. The wood was just behind the kitchen where the fairy-like form of pretty winsome Elsa constantly flitted. Several times she brought the worker a glass of cool lemonade and then they had an enjoyable chat together.

"See here, Mr. Ross," said Bert, two days later, "that wood is all sawed and I found this little bag under the last log."

"Oho! you did?" chuckled the old man. "What's in it, now?"

"A dozen gold half eagles."

"That so?" chirped the old man. "I reckon the fairies have rewarded you for your industry. See here, Mr. Delancy, I put them there and you're going to keep them."

"I don't like overpay—" began Bert.

"There's better than that coming," announced Mr. Ross. "I've been studying you, and that ladylike book-keeper, and that shiftless assistant manager. You can have the position if you want it."

Bert did not reply. His face grew so serious and thoughtful that Mr. Ross stared at him in wonder.

"Why!" he exclaimed, "you don't mean to say you turn down that kind of a chance of a lifetime, do you?"

"It depends," said Bert deliberately.

"On what?"

"No—on whom," corrected Bert. "I'm a plain, blunt fellow, Mr. Ross. I'm half in love with Miss Elsa. I'll